

Spring 1-15-2001

ENG 3009-006: Myth and Culture

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Loudon, Michael, "ENG 3009-006: Myth and Culture" (2001). *Spring 2001*. 83.
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Michael Loudon
 Spring 2001 (TR 1230-1345-CH318)
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Office Hours:
 MTWR 11:00-12:00;
 or by appointment

ENGLISH 3009G.006: Myth and Culture

Course Description: Through primary readings of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding by using comparative analysis. Prerequisite: English 1002C, or 1092C, or the equivalent.

Course Format: Lecture and discussion, preferably much more the latter, dependent on your willingness and preparation to contribute. Journal writing per the *syllabus* should provide ample opportunities to develop your ideas for class discussion.

Required Texts:

Cassirer, Ernst. *Language and Myth*. Trans. Susanne Langer. 1946; rpt. Dover, 1953.
 Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Basic, 1983.
 Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. U of Toronto P, 1978.
 Mayerson, Philip. *Classical Mythology in Literature, Art and Music*. Xerox, 1971.
 Sandars, N. K., trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin, 1960.

Course Requirements and Grading: Discussion (participation, reading quizzes as necessary)--15%; journal--20%; mid-term essay examination--10%; short essays, five (two 1-2 pp, three 2-3 pp) for a total of approximately 12 typewritten pages--35%; and a final essay examination--20%.

Journal: Throughout the term and on a near-daily basis (at least four times a week), you should develop 40-45 (handwritten, or 20-25 typed) pages in which you practice expressive and critical writing. Record responses to readings, however briefly; as a rough estimate, you should respond to one or two topics for each class; the *syllabus* suggests directions for query, and these should be regarded as assigned journal entries. Responses, of course, will vary; some may be brief and others should be in-depth and detailed in the effort to explore ideas and elaborate on associations. (The more of these latter sort, the better.)

Try, occasionally, responding to texts and issues both before and after class discussions; reflect on your own experience and explore its significance to the text, or the meaning of the text to your own experience. Generally, I shall expect you to work toward becoming "strong readers," those readers who pursue interpretation beyond the conventional responses that any given text seems to invite. Please, no diaries. Obviously, the journal is rough writing; I shall evaluate it as such.

General Policies:

Grading Standards: I shall follow the EIU English Department Guidelines, distributed in class. In all cases, I shall use a plus and minus system to distinguish, say, a high B from a low one.

Attendance: I do take roll, and I evaluate attendance only indirectly in the context of your participation in the course (15%); however, each two days is the equivalent of a week in the fifteen-week semester. Obviously, cuts have a direct influence on your participation.

Conferences: These are at your request unless I ask to see you. Please ask for help as soon as you feel you need it; please don't wait until the last few days of class.

Submission of work: Essays should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper only, titled and indicate the following: name, date, course and section number, and assignment number. Exercises and quizzes must be legible.

Late Essays: For each day that the essay is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade: an A essay due on Friday will be an F by the next Thursday. If difficulties arise, please see me.

Plagiarism: The English Department Policy

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)--has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If I discover an act of plagiarism, I shall exercise the right to the fullest extent possible. (See the Handbook, pp. 505-518, for a further discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and how to integrate properly your material from sources.)

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

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ENGLISH 3009G.006: Myth and Culture--Syllabus

January

T 9: **Course Introduction: Contexts and Frames**

R 11: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero's Journey* (video BL 304.H45x, 1987)
 The archetypal approach to myth

T 16: Discussion of *The Hero's Journey* and archetypal approaches

R 18: Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (MM): "The Meeting of Myth and Science"; "'Primitive' Thinking and the 'Civilized' Mind"; "When Myth Becomes History" (Structuralist approaches)

T 23: Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (LM):

"The Place of Language and Myth in the Pattern of Human Culture"; "The Evolution of Religious Ideas"; "Language and Conception"

R 25: (continued)

T 30: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (LK):

"Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought"; "Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination"; "Common Sense as a Cultural System."

February

R 1: (continued)

T 6: **Review Discussion:** Comparison of perspectives and methods:

interpretive anthropology (LK), structuralism (MM), archetypal (handouts) and symbolist (LM) approaches to myth studies. Assumptions and experience--student premises for developing working definitions of myth, religion, history and science. What world through whose eyes?

Writing: Journal responses; Essay #1 assignment--working definitions (1-2 pp). (These theoretical readings will be introduced in lecture, but you should read them carefully and reflectively. Work through them over the course of the term; for example, finish the Levi-Strauss chapters by the second week, work through the Cassirer book in the third week and complete the Geertz essays over the next two weeks. You can always, of course, go back and forth among the texts and essays as one mythic text or another seems to lend itself to a particular approach--and your journals are always available to explore and to clarify your thoughts.)

R 8: **Middle Eastern Mythology: The Epic of Gilgamesh**

Readings: N. K. Sanders, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; Geertz, LK: "Art as a Cultural System"; "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections of the Symbolics of Power." Cassirer, LM: "Word Magic."

Discussion: Mesopotamian (Sumerian and Babylonian), Egyptian, Ugaritic and Hittite mythologies. Types of myth--ritual, origin, cult, prestige and eschatological concepts. Diffusion and disintegration of myths. Anything familiar here? The quest for immortality. Friendship with the "other," the 'wild' man. Searching for power, the power of the search--heroic identity through struggle. An early flood myth. Death, sleep and the uses of the dream and the name.

Writing: Journal responses; essay #2 assignment--analysis of one myth, using perspective in *LK*, *MM* or *LM*--2-3 pp.

T 13: (continued)

R 15: (continued) **Essay #1 DUE (Journals due)**

T 20: **Greek and Roman Mythology**

Readings: Philip Mayerson, *Classical Mythology in Literature, Art, and Music*

Discussion: Cosmogony and Theogony. Allegorical and "natural" deities. Prometheus and Zeus. Matriarchy and Mycenaean culture, patriarchy and Dorian culture. Zeus and counterparts in other religions. Hera (Juno), Poseidon (Neptune), Demeter (Ceres), Persephone, Apollo, Dionysus (Bacchus), Artemis (Diana), Athena (Minerva), Ares (Mars), Aphrodite (Venus), Hermes (Mercury), Hades (Pluto), Orpheus, Perseus, Heracles (Hercules), Daedulus, Cadmus, Oedipus and Theseus. The uses of cultural legacy-gender, class and art. What are the games of gods?

Writing: Journal responses; short essay #3 assignment--compare one god to a contemporary leader or analyze a contemporary event from the point of view of a Greek myth, 2-3 pp; identification quiz.

R 22: (continued) **Essay #2 DUE**

T 27: **Native American mythologies**

Poetics of orality and literacy (handout)

March

R 1: Native American mythology (handout); Take-home midtern essay examination
Essay #3 DUE

T 6: "Acoma Pueblo origin myth" (handout); **midtern essay examination due**

R 8: (continued)

M 12 to F 16: Spring Break--no classes

T 20: "Winnebago trickster cycle" (handout)

R 22: (continued); Essay # 4 assignment

T 27: *The Mission* (film)

R 29: (continued); discussion of myth, culture and colonization

April

T 3: **Hindu mythology** (Introductory concepts)

R 5: *The Mahabharata* (film); **Essay #4 DUE**

T 10: (continued)

R 12: (continued); Essay #5 assignment

T 17: (continued)

R 19: (continued)

T 24: **Review:** Geertz, *LK*: "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought"; "Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective." **Essay #5 DUE**

R 26: **Review:** Cassier, *LM*: "The Successive Phases of Religious Thought"; "The Power of Metaphor." (**Journals due**)

Final Examination: Tuesday, May 1, 12:30-2:30 in CH318